

King John of England



Directions: Examine each document related to changes in royal authority under John's rule and discuss and answer the questions that follow.

Toe to Toe with Tricky Phil

Henry was succeeded first by his son Richard the Lion-Hearted, hero of the Third Crusade. When Richard died, his younger brother John took the throne. John ruled from 1199 to 1216. He failed as a military leader, earning the nickname John Softsword. John lost Normandy and all his lands in northern France to the French under Philip Augustus. This loss forced a confrontation with his own nobles.

1. How did King John lose to King Philip of France?



Not That Innocent

Next, John battled with Innocent III over selecting a new archbishop of Canterbury. When John rejected to pope's nominee, the pope excommunicated him. Innocent also placed England under the interdict—the papal order that forbade Church services in an entire kingdom (essentially nation-wide excommunication!). Even the strongest ruler was likely to give in to that pressure. To save himself and his crown, John had to accept England as a fief of the papacy and pay a yearly fee to Rome.

Source: "Evolving Traditions of Government", Elizabeth Gaynor Ellis, *World History*, Prentice Hall

2. How did King John lose to Pope Innocent III?

Bested by the Barons

English nobles present the Magna Carta to King John at Runnymede, a field along the Thames River.

"King John, when he saw that he was deserted by almost all, so that out of his regal superabundance (large amount) of followers he scarcely retained seven knights, was much alarmed [that] the barons (nobles) would attack his castles and reduce (destroy) them without difficulty, as they would find no obstacle to their so doing... accordingly, at the time and place pre-agreed on [Runnymede], the king and nobles... began a long discussion about terms of peace and aforesaid (previously discussed) liberties. ... King John, seeing that he was inferior in strength to the barons, without raising any difficulty, granted the underwritten laws and liberties, and confirmed to them by his charter."

—Roger of Wendover



3. In reaction to losing lands in France, John excessively raised taxes and made nobles concerned that he was becoming too powerful and was unfit to rule. How did they respond?

4. Why did John sign the Magna Carta if it limited his power?

The Magna Carta

1. We have also granted to all the freemen of our Kingdom, for us and our heirs, forever, all the underwritten liberties, to be enjoyed and held by them and their heirs, from us and from our heirs.

14. And also to have the common council of the kingdom, to assess and aid... and for the assessing of taxes, we will cause to be summoned the Archbishops, Bishops, Abbots, Earls, and Great Barons, individually by our letters. And besides, we will cause to be summoned in general by our sheriffs and bailiffs (government officials)...

38. No bailiff [officer of the court] for the future shall, upon his own unsupported complaint, put anyone to his "law," without credible witnesses brought for this purposes.

39. No freeman shall be taken or imprisoned . . . or exiled or in any way destroyed, nor will we [the king] go upon him nor send upon him, except by the lawful judgement of his peers or by the law of the land.

40. To no one will we sell, to no one will we refuse or delay, right or justice.

5. The right of Due Process originally came from the Magna Carta. It means that a person cannot be arrested or imprisoned without going through a fair legal process. Identify and quote the line in the document that refers to this right.

Responding to the Quaestio

How and against whom did Monarchs compete for power in Medieval Europe? Which monarchy had the most success in that regard? Rank them first, second, and third, and explain why each got that rating.

Holy Roman Empire	France	England

Q: How far did the political efforts of kings help to increase their power? Are there other ways they could increase their power? What would you suggest to them?